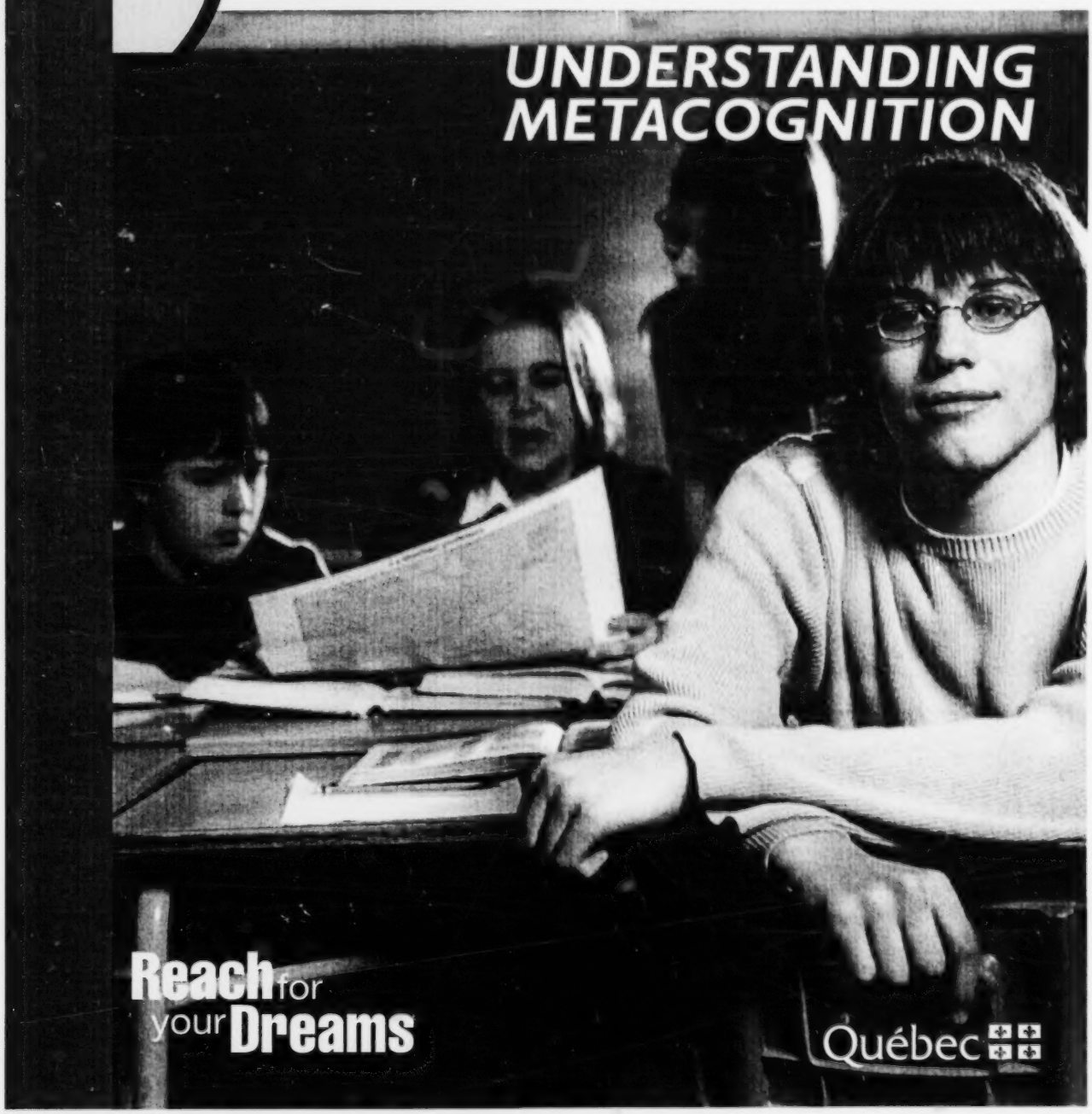
VOL. 5, NO. 5—JUNE 2005

# SCHOOLSCAPES

WORKING TOGETHER
**TO INSTRUCT, SOCIALIZE AND PROVIDE QUALIFICATIONS**



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# Summary

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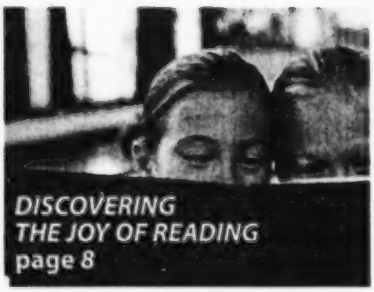
**COVER PAGE**
Teacher Sophie Loubert (centre) working with a group of students.

*By Colette Boucher*

This last issue of *Schoolscapes* for the 2004-2005 school year opens with a speech by Pierre Bergevin, Assistant Deputy Minister for Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Education, given at the provincial training session for resource persons on March 14 and 15. Mr. Bergevin reaffirmed his commitment to the education reform and his faith in the success of all students. He assured meeting participants that the MELS will continue to support them in their work to construct, understand and apply the new Québec Education Program (QEP).

The theme of this two-day meeting was metacognition in the classroom. The session aimed to explain and illustrate what is meant by metacognition, and to help resource persons make connections between this concept and the QEP. In education, using metacognition means helping students become aware of what they know and how they learned what they know. To observe how this translates into practice, *Schoolscapes* visited the classrooms of one elementary school teacher and one secondary school teacher. Their experiences show how incorporating metacognition into learning ties in closely with the QEP, which emphasizes the student's role in constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving knowledge from teachers.

The *Schoolscapes* team wishes you a great summer; we look forward to joining you again in the fall to continue the journey of implementing and exploring the new Québec curriculum together.



## *A meeting of minds*

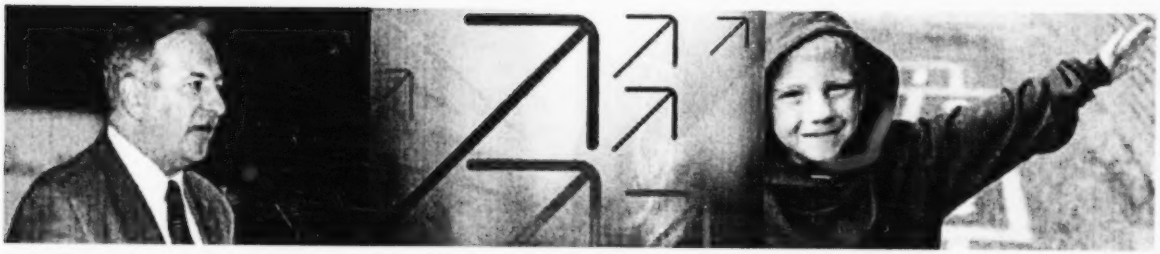
*Comments recorded by Pascale Sauvé*

come before you, dear colleagues, with much respect and humility," Bergevin began. "I will contribute what I can to help put in place all the pieces of the puzzle that will, once finished, form Québec's education reform. Like all individuals I'd like to think I possess certain strengths and limitations. Standing here before you, I repeat what I have already said elsewhere: I am committed to putting my energy into what I do, to putting my strengths at your service; in turn, I am counting on you to help me overcome my limitations."

"In the last 40 years, we have built an extraordinary education system," he continued. "It is characterized by two elements. Over the years, we have learned to make the changes necessary to prevent stagnation. When we modify an education program, when we change our Basic school regulation, when we decide to explore new instructional dynamics, it is not because our system has failed. It is because society, life, is constantly evolving. Over the last 40 years, we have been able to adapt quickly to these changes in our society. The second characteristic is that we have always been able to count on motivated, qualified, competent and committed people in the education community."

"Of course, some people will always criticize the work of others," Bergevin added. "We live in a society based on the rule of law, where freedom of expression exists and freedom of the press is an indisputable right that must be protected and upheld. However, that does not mean that we should accept contempt. And to all those who work each day to build programs and develop tools that school boards and schools can use to educate our children, I say that we do not have to tolerate people who ridicule or scorn the work we are doing. I want to be clear that, while I recognize a person's right to criticize, and that everyone is entitled to their own opinion, I think contempt is different. Some of the articles I have read of late belong to a way of thinking that I had thought long past. Following my discussions with the Minister, it is clear that we will not remain silent on this front. I think the population has a right to complete and accurate information. It has a right to discover the extraordinary face of what is starting to happen in Québec schools. We all need to feel supported and united in what we are doing."

"I met and discussed these issues with our new Minister, and he has stated that he is ready to defend the education reform," Bergevin emphasized. "We have a Minister who wants to stay informed, who wants to be convinced, and believe me, you can count on him to get the job done."



By Eve Kraimer

Metacognition in education means getting students to think about how they learn. It involves getting students to reflect on what goes on in their heads to solve a problem, what links they are making to other knowledge, and what strategies work best for them so that they can apply these strategies to other situations in the future.

"To me, metacognition equals questioning and awareness," says Guylaine Melançon, an Elementary Cycle Two teacher at the École Saint-Simon (Commission scolaire des Chênes). She works at developing metacognition in her students on a regular basis. It's not something you plan into your schedule, she explains, but rather, something you do in your day-to-day teaching, either with individual students, in small groups or with the whole group. "You seize opportune moments when the student is in a learning situation. You go see the student and say, 'Tell me how you did that,' or 'What did you use to find that answer?'"

The reform is conducive to metacognition, she notes. Before, teachers gave students the content. Now, students are put in situations where they have to construct their own learning: they're given a situation and have to figure out how they will resolve the problem, or what tools they will use to complete the task.

Getting students to think about how they learn can take many forms. For example, for the past few years, Melançon has been using reading profiles with her students. At the start of the year, the class talks about what makes a good reader. Then, after identifying a number of competencies, they build three profiles: beginner, intermediate and expert. The profiles, written in words the children understand, are posted in the classroom. After a student has finished reading, Melançon asks: Where do you situate yourself? Why? As the students progress during the year, the profiles evolve as well.

In Social Sciences, her students have been working in small groups to answer a series of questions about New France, using a collection of texts and archival documents. To complete the task, they have to figure out how to work together as a group. At the end of the period,

*"Metacognition is not something you plan into your schedule, but rather, something you do in your day-to-day teaching."*

Melançon questions the class on their work methods: How did they organize themselves? What worked well? What didn't? What could they improve for next time? Students share their strategies and experiences.

Students with learning difficulties also benefit from metacognition. "Often, students with difficulties have a hard time figuring out what is going on in their heads," explains Nathalie Hébert, an education consultant with the Commission scolaire des Chênes, who works with Melançon and other teachers. "The act of putting it into words helps them become aware of their process. And as a teacher, it helps you zero in more quickly on what you need to do to help the student."

It is also a window onto differentiation. "In mathematics, for example, different students will use different strategies to solve a problem," Melançon explains. She helps each one figure out which strategy works best for them. Not only does this make students more involved in their learning, but they are less afraid of making mistakes. "The students feel like they have control over the task," Hébert adds.

## Secondary school

"What's important [for developing metacognition] is for the students to be in a complex learning situation," says Sophie Loubert, who teaches Secondary I, II and III geography, computers, and multimedia and communications at École Secondaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys (Commission scolaire Marie-Victorin). "When they're placed before a complex situation, they're forced to make connections with prior learning to carry out the task."

For example, in Secondary III geography, her students recently worked in groups to create a theme board on a natural park in Canada. They had to include various elements such as the social and economic aspects, a map, etc. "I give them the criteria and say: Go! They have to figure out, in this case, what a social and economic aspect is: Did we talk about that before? They have access to any resource they want, just like us, in real life."

Inevitably, at some point, the students run into an obstacle, and that's where metacognition comes in. "I try to help them make connections, by asking questions, and reminding them of things they've already learned." At the end of the project, she reviews their process: how did they go about the task? Students share and learn from each other's strategies.

As her 32 students are working, Loubert goes from team to team, helping them along. "If someone does something really exceptional, I'll say, 'Wow! That's great! How did you come up with that?' Then I'll ask them to share what they did with the rest of the class. In explaining to others, the student realizes what he did well and is proud, while the other students become aware of the process that went on inside their heads."

Loubert finds metacognitive techniques very effective. When students encounter a difficulty, she'll ask them: What did you do last time you came up against that kind of problem? How did you resolve it? Would that strategy work here? If not, could you adapt it? "It's also a way of making students realize that nothing they do is lost. They can always learn from it, whether it was positive or negative." She adds that it's also important for students to realize that knowing how they learn will help them not just in school, but in life—whether they're getting their driver's licence or learning how to cook.

She also uses this type of questioning to motivate her students. "How many times in a day do we hear, 'This is boring. *C'est plate.*' So I say, 'Why is it boring? What is it about the task that you don't like? Is there something we could change that would make it more interesting?'"

## Metacognition and socio-constructivism

Britt-Mari Barth, a professor from the Institut Supérieur de Pédagogie de Paris, was a guest speaker at the provincial training session for resource persons held in Québec City on March 14 and 15. In her presentation, she discussed the role of metacognition in the construction of meaning, and how teachers can serve as mediators to help students develop a metacognitive outlook.

"Metacognition means being aware of what we know, understanding how we learned what we know, and being able to reproduce this process consciously in another context," said Barth.

She described a learning scenario where the teacher presents slides of a few paintings and asks students to identify elements that the paintings have in common. The teacher writes their answers on the board. "The students feel invited to participate. All the answers are noted and therefore correct. This creates a feeling of psychological security and intellectual freedom."

Then, the teacher presents a few more paintings, and asks the students to identify elements in common with the previous ones. She crosses out the elements that students decide are not common, and adds the new ones that have been discovered. "The students have a problem to solve and a method; the challenge is doable."

Next, the teacher presents some paintings that she claims are different. She asks the students to figure out why. Slowly, new categories are created: instead of focusing on the people or objects in the painting, students begin to look at the brushstrokes, the light, the style. The students are discovering new tools to differentiate the paintings, and new vocabulary to express themselves.

With these tools and vocabulary in hand, the students look at more paintings to determine whether they fit the criteria. This serves to validate and enrich their understanding. Finally, the teacher takes all these ideas and, after creating a concept map, reveals the concept at hand: *Impressionism*.

On their own, Barth points out, the students might not have thought to look for similarities and differences and draw inferences. The exercise also showed them that not all observers see the same things, thereby encouraging dialogue and discussion. "From this perspective, learning means learning how to master intellectual tools." The teacher's role is therefore to expose the students to these tools and to help students develop a language for talking about them. She quoted the educational theorist Lev Semenovich Vygotsky: "Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them."

To carry out metacognition with their students, Barth said, teachers must try to recognize the path that thinking takes during real situations, to design learning sequences that generate student reflection, to model reflection in front of students, to think aloud with them, to make them aware of these mental activities, and to help students name them and put them into practice in an increasingly autonomous manner.

## Asking the right questions

Back in the classroom, both Melançon and Loubert admit that using metacognitive techniques is not easy. It requires that teachers be very focused and attentive, and learn how to seize opportunities when they present themselves. Teachers also have to learn how to ask the right questions, and to vary their strategies.

"It takes a lot of practice," says Hébert. She suggests going bit by bit. "It's destabilizing for teachers at first. But it's also demanding for students who have never done it before. At the beginning, you have to equip them. You may have to give them examples of the type of answer you're looking for."

However, both teachers say it's worth the investment of time and energy. "Once you've acquired the strategies, you develop a whole other relationship with your students," says Loubert. "They see that you're truly concerned about whether or not they understand."

Want to learn more about metacognition? Several articles on the topic have been published in *Vie pédagogique*: "La métacognition en chair et en âme," by Paul Francoeur and "Réflexivité, métacognition et compétence," by Domenico Masciotra (February-March 2005), as well as "Métacognition et communication : deux processus en interrelation," by Louise Lafortune and Ginette Dubé (April-May 2004). You can access the articles on the magazine's Web site: **<www.viepedagogique.gouv.qc.ca>**

*"Metacognition means being aware of what we know, understanding how we learned what we know, and being able to reproduce this process consciously in another context."*

By Eve Krakow

It all started several years ago, when the QESN-RÉCIT team was working with teachers on project-based learning and integrating the reform. "Teachers had their own projects they wanted to continue, and they saw the Québec Education Program as an additional thing they had to do," recalls Christine Truesdale, the lead designer on the project. "We wanted to show how they could integrate the two, and give them a model to do this."

As well, in the English sector, many teachers were using strategies originating from elsewhere, such as the United States or Ontario, which meant they weren't adapted to the Québec curriculum. "We wanted to show how teachers could combine the two."

The QESN-RÉCIT team started with paper tools and workshops. Then they began to wonder: could they turn this into an interactive database? And so the idea for an online curriculum planner was born.

Called *Plan-It!*, the tool contains all the elements and content of the QEP for elementary school: broad areas of learning, cross-curricular competencies, subject-specific competencies and their key features, essential knowledge, etc. "It allows you to select which parts of the QEP you want to focus on and to plan your learning situation and activities accordingly," Truesdale explains. The tool also suggests planning and evaluation strategies for each element selected.

There is no limit to the number of activities that can be entered. As well, you don't have to plan every detail in advance—you can modify or add to the learning situation plan as you go.

## Sharing and collaboration

While, at the moment, the tool exists as a pre-release, stand-alone version, the final version will allow users to share their learning situations with designated colleagues by logging on through the Internet. For example, if a group of teachers in different subjects are working together on a cycle project, each will be able to view the activities that the others have planned.

Teachers may also choose to publish their projects, i.e. to put their work into a common online database and share them with teachers across the province. Over time, this will lead to a bank of model learning situations developed by Québec teachers.

Since many teachers work with colleagues in both languages, the planner is bilingual. However, because QESN-RÉCIT's function is to serve the English community, it did not have a mandate to adapt the tool to the French sector, which means programs such as French, Language of Instruction, and English as a Second Language are not included.

The Secondary QEP will be incorporated into a later version. As well, the QESN-RÉCIT team is developing a module that would allow teachers to track which competencies they have targeted in their classroom over a given period.

Curious? You can download the tool from the Web site:
**<www.qesnrecit.qc.ca/planit>**

By Paule Belleau

We met with Ginette Vincent, coordinator of educational resources, Marie-France Laberge, André Roux and Martine Hart, education consultants, and Laurence Lahaie, in charge of libraries. The team explained how it focuses on the enjoyment of books to help students find meaning in reading.

## Promotion of reading at the centre of the school's orientations

To begin, an in-depth analysis of the situation in schools was carried out to identify students' reading difficulties, determine factors for success and target the most pressing needs. The promotion of reading was integrated into the educational projects and success plans of participating schools in order to rally all personnel around the problem. Slowly, various projects were set up, bit by bit so as not to overwhelm the school teams. But, in concrete terms, what have these initiatives changed in the lives of teachers, students and parents?

## New activities and more resources for students

### Better equipped libraries

At the start of the process, the catalogues of the school library collections were computerized to give students greater autonomy in choosing their reading material. Budgets were set aside for the purchase of books, newspapers and magazines carefully chosen to match students' interests. Particular attention was given to the aesthetics of the works selected. The government action plan on reading will give an added boost to these endeavours by granting schools additional resources to meet international standards: 15 to 20 relevant publications per student.

### Reading circles

Students now take part in reading circles, either conventional or virtual. But this isn't about writing book reports or critiques. Emphasis is on the enjoyment of reading, discussion, and offering students a wide variety of learning activities. In one school, for example, students compared how different daily newspapers covered the same event.

The virtual reading and writing circle, set up by the Languages RÉCIT, is a Web portal that offers a variety of instructional and learning tools. (Visit <www.recitlangues.org/zj/cercle>.) Students undertake searches that help them to uncover specific elements in the books they choose on their own. For some students, the motivation to read comes from their desire to find the answers; in this respect, many students get caught up in the game and thus come to enjoy reading through an indirect route. This virtual reading circle also suggests avenues for reflection on the world of the book. RÉCIT facilitators—dubbed "explorers"—sustain these reflections by corresponding with students by e-mail.

These reading circles not only provide opportunities for reading and appreciating literary works, but they enable students to experience stimulating discussions and writing situations, while awakening their critical thinking skills. This initiative also allows for differentiated instruction, since students can choose the books most suitable for them.

### Authors in classrooms

Students in the Commission scolaire Marie-Victorin also welcome authors into their classrooms. This contact helps them become familiar with the process of literary creation.

### Games in preschool

Preschool children participate in the *Émergence de l'écrit* (Emerging writing) project. All kinds of fun activities are used to bring the children into contact with books. They are encouraged to handle books, to smell them, to follow the story with their finger, to talk about the content and the vocabulary, to point out words and to use their alphabet primer. Books are also used to help the children express their emotions. For example, if a child is going through a difficult time, such as the death of a relative or their parents' divorce, the teacher chooses books to help them deal with this situation.

## New avenues for teachers

### Cultivating one's own reading enjoyment

The project *Partageons notre plaisir de lire* (Sharing our joy of reading) was set up this year to cultivate the enjoyment of reading among all members of the school staff. Meetings led by the school board's education consultants promote an exchange of ideas among these adult readers.

### Access to a network of teaching support

Professional development in the area of reading is now given to small groups of volunteers, which also receive more intensive support. In three annual meetings, these teams discuss the choice of books to propose to students, the production of learning tools, and the validation of the steps taken. The education consultants also go into classrooms to support teachers in setting up new activities.

### Getting to know students individually

The teachers take time with each of their students to get to know their interests and to guide them in choosing their books. Gradually, they bring students who hate reading to choose books that are better suited to them. The teachers also become aware of the reasons why some students are resistant to reading.

### Reorganizing learning activities

The education consultants at the Commission scolaire Marie-Victorin caution teachers interested in trying out new reading activities to avoid overloading the program. They suggest replacing old activities with new ones, rather than simply adding more activities. Of course, this means letting go of materials that focus on the same competencies as those that will be developed in the new activities, using a different approach. A sound knowledge of the different subjects can make this task easier.

## Getting parents and the community involved

By means of these projects and initiatives, the Commission scolaire Marie-Victorin is attempting to bring about a genuine shift in culture, which requires the participation of parents and the community. Therefore, working in partnership with the municipality, the school board created *La fête du livre et de la lecture de Longueuil* (Longueuil book and reading festival), aimed chiefly at elementary school children and their parents. This initiative is proving to be an effective way to make adults aware of their role as model readers.

The ministerial action plan *And what are you reading?* will no doubt foster the creation of reading projects across Québec. The measures proposed will give students and teachers access to new resources. Parents' involvement will be sought though a campaign promoting books and reading, and contests organized by the Ministère will serve to motivate students to set up reading projects. While these initiatives are ultimately intended to foster student success at school, they also help students develop their identity and, for those who let themselves be hooked, they promise hours and hours of enjoyment.

By Eve Krakow

# IDC Learning Symposium 2005

If the brain is the organ for learning, then educators need to be brain experts. And we're not," she began. In 1984, Kaufeldt, a former teacher, attended a conference for teachers of gifted and talented children. "They were giving out *secret information*," she confided, "about left-brain and right-brain research." This sparked her 20-year passion for keeping up with brain research.

"There are three key points educators need to know about the brain," she said. (1) If the brain perceives a threat, it goes into a reflex response. This minimizes its ability to learn new things. (2) With each new experience, the brain's neurons grow and form branches, called dendrites. "With more experiences, you actually create denser brains." (3) Experiences need to be repeated in order for these new connections to hold.

So how can educators make sure their teaching is brain-compatible? "Maintain a safe and secure climate and environment, provide key experiences in a multi-sensory, enriched environment to stimulate brain growth, and orchestrate active processing of new knowledge," said Kaufeldt.

## The reflex response

"We're hardwired to react for survival," she said. The reflex response may be triggered by a physical conflict (hunger, cold, physical discomfort), by memories of past experiences, or by not knowing what is going to happen next.

Kaufeldt explained that the amygdala triggers the adrenaline hormone. The heart beats faster, blood pressure rises, the throat constricts, our body gets ready to take flight. With humour and zeal, she acted out how each stage of the reflex response leads to classroom behaviours from lip biting and necklace chewing to foot tapping and fidgeting.

Yet the amygdala serves another purpose: it files new, incoming information. "But it won't do this if the brain perceives stress."

That's why teachers need to create a welcoming atmosphere and find ways to reduce stress for their students. Strategies include posting daily agendas and procedures so that students know what to expect; creating a "body-compatible" environment that encourages movement and alternative work positions; orchestrating "inclusion activities" to build a sense of belonging; and allowing processing time that includes choices. "When you offer students a choice, even between two things, it empowers and engages them."

*"Make sure you have a variety of ways for students to process information so that it holds for the long haul."*

By Pascale Sauvé

## Key experiences

"We're born with one hundred billion neurons in our brain. With each experience, the neurons grow branches, or dendrites," said Kaufeldt. "The more experiences you have in a multi-sensory, enriched environment, the more neural networks begin to grow and web and form."

Yet children are arriving in school with fewer prior experiences, she points out. They have become so technology dependent that they are no longer outside catching frogs, digging holes and inventing things. This means teachers may have to build discovery play into their activities, to help children gain those first-hand experiences.

In order for new neural connections to take hold, students need to actively process their new knowledge. "If you don't repeat that activity, or recall or reflect on it in some way, those initial branches drop off. And I believe this is why, as teachers, we are in this vicious cycle of re-teaching."

Kaufeldt suggests planning frequent opportunities for students to reflect on the product and process of their learning. This can be as simple as pausing to have students discuss things with a classmate. "Make sure you have a variety of ways for students to process information so that it holds for the long haul."

Visit the IDC Website at:
**<www.qesnrecit.qc.ca/reform>**

**The school community now has a new resource: the Web site of the *Accompagnement-recherche-formation* project. Unveiled this spring, the site provides general information on this guidance, research and professional development project, as well as tools and support materials for the entire education community.**

Headed by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Sport et du Loisir in collaboration with the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, this project is in keeping with the aims and orientations of the education reform and the implementation of the Québec Education Program (QEP). Now in its third year, its objectives are:

- to support school personnel in their professional development by bringing together theory and practice
- to ensure continuity and consistency among the various professional development activities to ensure positive results in schools
- to pilot collective reflection and construction
- to validate socio-constructivist tools and materials to meet the needs of teams providing support and guidance to school personnel
- to provide greater understanding of the components of the QEP, by supplying materials, helping people become familiar with them and deepening their understanding, with a goal towards becoming more autonomous
- to foster the autonomy and influence of support teams in the school community

The Web site was created to develop a provincial network for implementing the QEP, in order to validate tools and support materials interactively, to encourage dialogue and foster collective construction, and to disseminate documents for support and guidance.

It offers a large bank of resources for the school community, including professional development activities and situations, avenues for intervention, presentation documents, experiences from within the school community and a selection of useful links.

To find out more about the *Accompagnement-recherche-formation* project, go to:
**<www.uqtr.c/accompagnement-recherche>**

By Pascale Sauvé

# Individualized Education Plans in Secondary School

**The special education team at the École secondaire Pointe-Lévy is drafting an individualized education plan (IEP) for each of its students, based on their individual needs and abilities. To do so, the team has set up a consultation process which it continues to improve on an ongoing basis—with convincing results!**

"For the last three years, at the request of the school principal, all our special needs students have had an individualized education plan," said Manon Tessier, a teacher in the alternative path (CSA, cours secondaire alternatif) and core teacher. "Before, we worked with a tool that we called a 'visa.' It was a little booklet that the homeroom teacher filled out once a month and then sent home to be signed by the parents. It was different from an IEP because basically it tracked academic progress, particularly in French and Mathematics; however, it didn't touch very much on the human aspect. Then, virtually overnight, we had to draft 120 individualized education plans." Faced with this request, the team had to get organized very quickly.

A committee was created to develop a strategy for the development and implementation of the IEPs. "The committee met regularly for two years, the time needed to adjust the model, to make sure it was appropriate for our students, and to establish a procedure," Tessier explained.

Slowly, the process took shape. "We adapted an assessment tool that the students, teachers and parents complete. Then we synthesize the results," explained Hélène Berthiaume, a counsellor in reeducation. "As a team, we consult each other to identify the student's strengths and priority needs, in order to determine what we need to focus on to foster his or her success."

Nothing is set on paper, however, until a meeting is held with the student, the parent, the core teacher, the principal or vice-principal, the psychologist, the guidance counsellor and any other person participating in the process. "When everything is written down ahead of time, there's very little room for spontaneity or for adding means suggested by the student or the parent," explained Pascale Gingras, the Vice-principal. "We're all aware of the student's strengths and difficulties, but if we want students to name these themselves, they have to be aware of them and take an active role in finding the solutions. We focus our discussion on the positive points and on finding solutions, rather than on the problems and difficulties. The purpose of the meeting is not to put the student or parent on trial, but to help the student improve at school. The meeting takes place in a climate of trust, where everyone feels comfortable. You can tell, because the student and the parents come out of it smiling."

At the start of the year, school personnel therefore meet with each student and his or her parents in order to develop or update his or her individualized education plan. "They're not all experiencing

major difficulties; many of them are doing quite well," Gingras noted. "But we feel it's important to meet them and to create an IEP even if they're doing well, if only to applaud their achievements and enable them to set new goals for themselves. It's good for the student's self-esteem, and for the parents. For years these parents have been hearing about their child's difficulties, and suddenly we're talking about their child in a positive way. These are important moments."

During the meeting, the vice-principal acts as moderator and writer. At the end, the student's individualized education plan is completed, signed, photocopied and given to each of the participants. "Every nine days, we meet as a team to discuss priorities and track progress on the individualized education plans," added Gingras. During the year, the individualized education plans are revised at least once with the student, or as required. "We assess the situation," Tessier explained. "We take stock of the progress the student has made, what means were put in place and what worked well. Usually, by the time we review the IEP in March, the students have already achieved several objectives!"

## Involving students in projects

"When we first implemented the IEPs, we focused on one important aspect: to have our students carry out a project," said Berthiaume. "We figured that the best way to do this was to have them set a goal. In the past, they worked on this goal mostly with the psychologist and the teachers. But we realized that the guidance counsellor was well placed to help students focus on a project."

For the past two years, guidance counsellor Kathy Vignola has met with all Secondary II and III students in the alternative path at the beginning of the school year. "The student has to decide on a study or life project. With this in mind, we review the student's acquired learning," she explained. "We identify what the student has already achieved, and we target what else they have to do to carry out their project, such as prerequisites for vocational education, getting their secondary school diploma or entering CEGEP. We situate these objectives in time and plan out the steps to achieve them. So it's very motivating for students, because these are often short- or medium-term goals." This review of acquired learning is also presented to parents and participants at the meeting to develop the student's IEP.

*With this process, students have the opportunity to recognize their difficulties, their strengths and their talents and to review their acquired learning, in order to give meaning to their academic path.*

## The results

"With this process, the students soon feel involved in their learning and focus on their project," the Vice-principal said. "We allow students to recognize their difficulties, their strengths and their talents and to review their acquired learning, in order to give meaning to their academic path. This greatly motivates students and helps build their self-confidence." The results are convincing: 80 percent of the students reach their objectives, such as obtaining a Secondary School Diploma or acquiring the prerequisites for vocational education. "I think it's a winning formula to prevent young people from dropping out of school," Berthiaume added. "I even think we should extend this process to students in the regular path who would stand to benefit. The students who come into the alternative path often have very low self-esteem and are very close to dropping out. We would have lost quite a few of them if we hadn't had this process in place."

"Teamwork is a big factor in this," said Gingras. "We have a creative team that is ready to go all out to help students to succeed. When a student is having difficulty, all the departments work together quickly to give that student the help and support needed. Our team shows a tremendous amount of openness toward students who are different from others. We welcome them as they are and bring them where they are able to go. We want to help students take flight. We say to them, 'Go ahead, spread your wings!' That's what we're working towards."

*With the collaboration of Christiane Joncas, coordinator for individualized education plans at the Direction de l'adaptation scolaire of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport.*

*By Pascale Sauvé*

"It all began last May," said Gratien Gagnon, spiritual care and guidance and community involvement animator, and one of the project's initiators. "In the student lounge, there was a big white wall, used for posters. A few people suggested that it would be fun to use this space to create a mural representing all the villages that the school's students came from. Then we realized that there was exactly enough room to create a work relating to each of the region's eleven parishes, plus a map of the school board." That was all that was needed for Nathalie Leblanc, visual arts teacher, Isabelle Lévesque, who teaches the individualized education unit, and Gagnon to seize the opportunity to develop a major unifying project that would draw on the ingenuity and talent of dozens of people in the school and community.

## The process

"We formed a committee to identify our educational aims," said Gagnon. "Taking into account the aspects specific to each of our respective subjects, we identified two: to develop a feeling of pride and belonging in our community, and to bring some life and colour into the school." The project was launched in September. First they explained the project to Secondary Cycle Two students in the arts option, to collect the names of volunteers. Then they formed teams, choosing two students from each village. "We also wanted to get into the spirit of the reform by opening up to the community," said Gagnon. "That's when we had the idea of contacting one or two artists in each village to work with the students to create the mural. That brought a whole other dimension to the project."

It was the students who had to find artists from their villages. "They're not all professional artists; in fact, most are people who paint or draw for their own leisure. Some students brought in their grandmother or another member of their family. It was very interesting." Each team, composed of the two students and one artist, was given the mandate to create a mural representing their village (based on a photograph, for example) or activities that take place in the village. Together, they developed their concept, decided on the composition and painted the mural in the style they wished. They worked on the murals from September to January. "Everyone went at their own pace," Gagnon explained. "Depending on the availability of the artist, the students were given certain periods off, especially during visual arts.

Sometimes they met in the evening or on the weekend. But for the most part, they worked on the murals during the day. The other students could see their progress and follow the process. Everyone was captivated by the project."

The students carried this extensive project through to completion. "From the start, the students were really interested in the project; they came on board immediately," said Gagnon. "They learned a tremendous amount in just a few months. The artists were encouraged to give the students tips, such as how to hold a paintbrush, what colours work well together, and how to use perspective. The project also gave students the opportunity to develop cross-curricular competencies that we had identified: *Uses information, Exercises critical judgment, Uses creativity, Adopts effective work methods* and *Cooperates with others*."

## Mission accomplished

Twelve beautiful murals now grace the wall of the student lounge. "When they had finished, the students would walk in front of the murals trying to identify their own village. Everyone who comes into the school rushes to see the murals. We achieved our goal: to develop a feeling of pride and belonging in our community. And with all this colour, the school atmosphere is much warmer and more lively."

"We also filmed the project and created a video montage," he said. "We asked the students what they got out of this project. They said it helped build their self-confidence and their trust in others. Working in collaboration with adults was also an enriching experience for them. They also said they were proud of themselves and the work accomplished, because they had contributed something to their school and their community."

The experience was also beneficial for the project team. "We each came from a different subject area," observed Gagnon. "We made a good team. We realized that it's possible to work on a project together even if we have different values and concerns. And if this project was such a success, it is largely a result of the collaboration and participation of all these people in the school and from the community."

## Arts and Culture Week in Québec Schools 2006

The next Arts and Culture Week in Québec Schools will take place from February 12 to 19, 2006. We hope this event will serve to promote culture in all the subject areas, with a wide range of cultural references playing a key role.

The week offers a fresh opportunity to spark teachers' creativity, curiosity and desire to work with resources in the cultural field to highlight the value of all school subjects in students' daily lives.

We encourage teachers to continue offering young people these original and varied artistic and cultural experiences throughout the month of February. To support the implementation of Arts and Culture Week in Québec Schools, an activity guide is once again being developed and will propose an array of intriguing and stimulating activities for preschool, elementary and secondary school.

Promotional material for Arts and Culture Week in Québec Schools, which will be available to elementary and secondary school teachers, will include a choreography, a dramatization, poems, posters and a song.

May new and exciting ideas inspire your school team next fall!

## Culture in the Schools Program

In order to increase students' exposure to the cultural world, the *Culture in the Schools Program* provides financial assistance to teachers for the realization of cultural projects. Carried out in cooperation with professional resources in the field of culture, these projects will be in keeping with the spirit of the education reform and offer schools a window on the world.

Students will play an active role and gain lifelong benefits as they develop their creativity, team spirit, critical thinking, aesthetic appreciation and self-esteem. This will allow them to become adults who are open-minded, attentive and aware, and more likely to contribute to the cultural vitality of their society.

The *Culture in the Schools Program* results from the merging of the *Culture in Education Partnerships* programs and the *Measure to Support the Introduction of a Cultural Dimension into Schools*.

For more information, contact your school board or regional office of either the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) or the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications (MCC), or go to one of the following Web sites:

<www.mcc.gouv.qc.ca/programme/culture-schools.htm>

<www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DGFJ/projets/culture/culture2004-2005.htm>

## Increasing the number of cultural experiences in the classroom and in school life

Are you seeking contributors to develop cultural projects?

The *Répertoire de ressources culture-éducation*, available in electronic format only, provides information on hundreds of artists, writers and cultural organizations that offer activities for preschool, elementary and secondary schools, as well as cultural resources in the education community. The directory accompanies the *Culture in the Schools Program*. You can find it at the following address:

<www.mcc.gouv.qc.ca/rencontres>

Culture in the School. A Class Act

# SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TOOLS, TEMPLATES AND RESOURCES

By law, all schools and centres are required to develop an educational project (or policies and objectives) and a success plan, while school boards are required to adopt a strategic plan. All must report annually to parents and the community.

To help schools, centres and school boards in this process, the QESN-RÉCIT Web site now features a section called **School Improvement in Québec**. Among other resources, the site provides templates developed by various schools and school boards, which others are encouraged to use and adapt to their own situations.

For example, under *The Schools: Success Plan*, there's a success plan checklist, a Secondary School/Centre Success Plan template designed by the Western Québec School Board, a School/Centre Success Plan Reporting Forms Information Bulletin provided by the New Frontiers School Board, guides for the development of "school portraits" (necessary precursors to success planning) and much more.

There's also a special section on the *New Approaches, New Solutions* (NANS) intervention strategy, with support documents such as a Rubric for Monitoring the Development and Implementation of School Success Plans, and a template for developing your Annual School Report, supplied by the English-Montréal School Board. Information on best practices and research will be added soon.

Under *School Boards: Strategic Plan*, you'll find several sample planning and process timelines provided by different school boards, checklists for reviewing priorities and strategies, and Québec-wide indicators for school board strategic plans.

It is a dynamic Web site, with new resources being added continually. Visit the site regularly to take advantage of all these tools and resources.

**<www.qesnrecit.qc.ca/reform/success>**

# CHOOSING A PET

Choosing a Pet is a learning and evaluation situation developed by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) as a research project for the purpose of assessing the performance of Elementary Cycle One students at the end of cycle. Materials used for the assessment have been assembled for distribution to all English public and private elementary schools in the spring of 2005.

Each English school board and each English school will receive one kit; reproducible materials will be available on CDs included in the kit.

# CSE BRIEF

The Conseil supérieur de l'Éducation has submitted a brief to the MELS on the draft regulation to amend the *Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary school education*. This document can be found on the Conseil's Web site, at: **<www.cse.gouv.qc.ca>**

Participants at the February 2005 IDC Learning Symposium (see article on page 10).


SCHOOLSCAPES

WORKING TOGETHER TO INSTRUCT, SOCIALIZE AND PROVIDE QUALIFICATIONS

***Schoolscapes* is under the responsibility of the Secteur de l'éducation préscolaire, de l'enseignement primaire et secondaire**

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